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C O N F I D E N T I A L GUADALAJARA 000112

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TAGS: PGOV PHUM PREL MX

SUBJECT: "GO BLANK YOUR MOTHERS!" - A GOVERNOR'S FALL FROM GRACE

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Department of State.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Jalisco Governor Emilio Gonzalez Marquez was once considered a possible contender for the National Action (PAN) Party's presidential nomination in 2012. But the Governor's greatest assets - an engaging personality and passionate oratory - have proved to be a double-edged sword. A series of self-inflicted verbal wounds, culminating in a tequila-influenced, obscenity-laden public diatribe against his political enemies have seriously damaged his reputation. His close relations with the Catholic Church, in a country where Church-State relations are still unsettled, has also provoked much controversy. A recovery from this political tailspin will be very difficult. End Summary.

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A Promising Start:  
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¶2. (C) Gonzalez Marquez - known to everyone as "Emilio" took office in March 2007 as a kinder, gentler, and more personable version of his predecessor, the dour but politically astute former Secretary of Government, Francisco Ramirez Acuna. He is also a more fervent Catholic and was not afraid to show it. At first, the press took a mild interest in such things as weekly Bible study sessions in the Governor's mansion, but as religion began to play a more prominent role in the Governor's public statements, public controversy grew.

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Six Packs and Silly Girls  
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¶3. (C) The first big controversy erupted over the Governor's desire to end a state program that distributed contraceptives to the poor. In the course of the debate, Emilio declared that if the government provided condoms to people, it might as well furnish a six pack of beer and a hotel voucher. Enraged opponents charged that the Governor was doing the Church's bidding, since Guadalajara's Cardinal had also attacked the program as immoral.

¶4. (C) Gonzalez's propensity to fund expensive television programs also generated much criticism, especially the multi-million dollar "Silly Girls Don't Go to Heaven" - a soap opera produced by television giant Televisa SA and filmed in Jalisco. The Governor assured a skeptical public that this show (and similar spectacles such as the Latin MTV awards) justified the public investment because they would promote the state and encourage tourism. Opponents responded that the real "promotion" would be of the Governor's image on a nationwide basis in advance of the 2012 presidential contest.

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The 90 Million Peso Firestorm  
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¶5. (C) The Governor's concentrated focus on religion and public spectacles culminated in his April 2008 decision to donate 90 million pesos (US \$8 million) in public funds to the Catholic Church for the construction of the "Sanctuary of the Martyrs," a

massive basilica planned for a hilltop on Guadalajara's outskirts, as a means of increasing religious tourism. This huge project is the brainchild of Guadalajara Cardinal Juan Sandoval Iniguez and will surpass Mexico City's Guadalupe Basilica in size. Fund raising had lagged, however, and for the Church, the Governor's donation was a godsend.

¶ 16. (C) For thousands of citizens, however, the Governor's action crossed the line between the separation of church and state, and the popular reaction was immediate and negative. Critics raged in the press and on the airwaves, and thousands of protests poured in to the State Human Rights Commission (CEDHJ), giving Gonzalez Marquez the dubious distinction of being the worst human rights violator in Mexico, in terms of the sheer number of complaints registered. Nevertheless, the Governor remained calm, telling the CG last Spring that he had predicted a month of tough criticism after which he expected popular passions would subside.

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A Night to Remember  
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¶ 17. (C) The public criticism did not diminish, but rather intensified as details of the donation became more widely known. The FOIA release of a 2005 Consulate cable that appeared to show a commitment by the Catholic Church to support Gonzalez Marquez's gubernatorial campaign added fuel to the fire. As the pressure mounted, Emilio took the podium at the Annual Diocesan Food Bank Fund Raising Dinner in April 2008 to present the state's traditional contribution. In front of the city's elites and television cameras, a visibly inebriated Governor waved his "blinking little paper" (the donation check), bellowed that his Secretary of Finance "had finally done something good for Jalisco," and then, begging the Cardinal's pardon, told his political opponents to "go blank their mothers!"

¶ 18. (C) A chastened Governor apologized profusely the next day, but the damage was done. Media criticism was savage, and hundreds of additional complaints arrived at the Human Rights Commission. His remarks were quickly posted on YouTube and other websites, and his opponents and even high school students gleefully chanted them during the Governor's public appearances. His image and popularity cratered, and the Catholic Church, facing its own critics, returned the Sanctuary donation.

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Damage Control  
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¶ 19. (C) Gonzalez Marquez kept a low profile during the summer and fall of 2008 as his staff sought opportunities to mitigate the damage and portray him as focused on the needs of the state. A round of "security summits" for example, enabled the Governor to take credit for Jalisco's comparatively lower rates of crime and violence. He also steered clear of major Church events, and emphasized government investment in important public works. Even then, however, his tongue occasionally got the better of him. When the wife of a prominent businessman was murdered in a brutal December 2008 carjacking, Emilio declared that Guadalajara's captains of industry had no right to criticize his security policies because their children never served in the police or the army. He backpedaled before a wave of elite indignation the next day, stating that he had meant to say that security was everyone's responsibility and that all citizens should contribute. His opponents were not assuaged.

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Comment: A Long Climb Back?  
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¶ 10. (C) Nearly a year later, Gonzalez Marquez's Private Secretary confided that the whole donation episode is still hurting the Governor's image. Although Jalisco has had previous governors use colorful language or drink too much, their indiscretions were never as highly publicized (or technologically preserved for posterity) as Emilio's have been. Some business leaders have written him off, and even the Church

- burned by the controversy - is keeping a bigger distance from the administration. The Governor's political allies were also defeated by associates of Francisco Ramirez Acuna in the vast majority of internal party contests to select the PAN's candidates for the July 2009 mayoral and Congressional elections. Paradoxically, however, Emilio's diminished political future and renewed focus on local issues have lately given his low popularity ratings a small boost. This will be aided by the completion of several major state projects such as Guadalajara's first bus rapid transit line, and the investment of over \$500 million dollars in public infrastructure this year.

¶11. (C) Can he come back? The conventional wisdom says no. But with four years to go in his term and several high profile events such as Guadalajara's hosting of the 2011 Pan-American Games available to showcase a reformed image, some form of political rehabilitation might be possible. For now, however, the rest of Mexico knows Emilio Gonzalez Marquez as the Governor who sought to give a substantial sum to the Catholic Church and cursed his opponents while doing so - a shaky basis for any kind of national campaign.

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